

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 018996

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 018996

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MO, AG, US, PFOR, MOPS, MASS, MR

SUBJECT: INR ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN  
CONFLICT

REFS: A) RABAT 5961; B) ALGIERS 0064

FOR AMBASSADOR HANDYSIDE FROM SAUNDERS

1. ANALYSES REF A (BEING REPEATED TO YOU) AND B HAVE  
GIVEN US FOOD FOR THOUGHT. WE HAVE JUST COMPLETED AN INTER-  
AGENCY MEMORANDUM CONSIDERING THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT  
IN THE SAHARA DISPUTE OVER THE NEXT 6 MONTHS (MAJOR JUDG-  
MENTS GIVEN BELOW). WE WOULD WELCOME YOUR REACTIONS TO IT  
AS WE PREPARE FOR FOLLOW-ON EFFORTS. (WE SOUGHT REACTIONS  
FROM ALGIERS AND RABAT IN SIMILAR CABLE JANUARY 20).

2. WE ARE NEXT PLANNING AN INR TREATMENT OF THE POSSI-  
BILITY THAT A MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN CONFRONTATION MAY CONTINUE

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 018996

OVER THE NEXT 2-3 YEARS. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE WOULD

APPRECIATE YOUR THOUGHTS -- IF POSSIBLE BY JANUARY 31 -- ON THE FOLLOWING: ASSUMING THE BOUMEDIENE REGIME HAS GIVEN UP ON "PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE" WITH THE MOROCCAN MONARCHY, WHAT PROSPECTS DO YOU SEE FOR MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN RELATIONS OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS? WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE VARIETIES OF AN ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONSHIP SHORT OF WAR? WHAT

WOULD BE THE POSITION OF MAURITANIA IN EACH OF THESE CASES? IF A WAR DID COME, WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE? HOW WOULD THE US BE AFFECTED BY A LONGER-TERM MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN CONFRONTATION SHORT OF WAR? HOW WOULD WE BE AFFECTED BY A WAR? WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT YOUR CLIENT WOULD CALL FOR OR WELCOME SOVIET INVOLVEMENT? WHAT KIND OF HELP IF ANY MIGHT BE REQUESTED?

3. FOLLOWING ARE THE MAJOR JUDGMENTS OF THE INTERAGENCY MEMORANDUM "SPANISH SAHARA: POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT" (FULL TEXT IS BEING POUCHED TO YOU TODAY):

ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT ALGERIA WOULD ACQUIESCE IN A MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN TAKEOVER OF THE SAHARA, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT BOUMEDIENE WILL SOON ABANDON THE POLISARIO FRONT, A NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON ALGERIAN SUPPORT. NOR DO WE BELIEVE THAT HASSAN WILL MAKE ANY MOVES WHICH WOULD MAKE AGREEMENT POSSIBLE BETWEEN ALGIERS AND RABAT. THE MOST LIKELY SITUATION WILL THEREFORE BE CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT GUERRILLA WARFARE BETWEEN THE ALGERIAN-BACKED POLISARIO FRONT AND MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN FORCES.

WE BELIEVE THAT A DELIBERATELY INITIATED WAR BETWEEN MOROCCO AND ALGERIA OVER CONTROL OF SPANISH SAHARA IS UNLIKELY OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS. DURING THIS TIME PERIOD, NEITHER PARTY WILL SEE THE DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY SITUATION AS SO HOPELESS AS TO REQUIRE LARGE-SCALE MILITARY ACTION AGAINST THE OTHER SIDE.

WAR BY MISCALCULATION IS ALSO UNLIKELY. IF IT SHOULD OCCUR, ITS MOST PROBABLE STIMULUS WOULD BE A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN GUERRILLA OPERATIONS AGAINST MOROCCAN AND

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 018996

MAURITANIAN FORCES BY THE POLISARIO FRONT. BUT THE MILITARY LIMITATIONS OF THE SAHARAN TERRAIN MAKE IT UNLIKELY THAT CONFLICT IN THIS REGION COULD REACH DANGEROUS PROPORTIONS OVER A PERIOD AS SHORT AS THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

WE CANNOT YET JUDGE WHETHER ALGERIA WILL SEEK A MAJOR INCREASE IN POLISARIO GUERRILLA OPERATIONS OR CONTINUE THEM AT THE PRESENT INCONCLUSIVE LEVELS. ALGIERS WOULD

BE MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT GREATER POLISARIO ACTIVITY IF MOROCCO UNDERTOOK MILITARY MOVES SUCH AS:

- A FURTHER MILITARY BUILDUP IN AREAS BORDERING ALGERIA;
- SIGNIFICANT NEW ARMS PURCHASES FROM THE US; OR PARTICULARLY
- A MOROCCAN EFFORT TO DESTROY OPPOSITION IN THE ENTIRE SAHARAN TERRITORY.

CONTINUING THE PRESENT LEVEL OF GUERRILLA OPERATIONS WOULD BOLSTER ALGERIA'S CLAIM THAT IT SUPPORTS NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLES. IT WOULD ALSO TIE DOWN A LARGE NUMBER OF MOROCCAN TROOPS AT A RELATIVELY SMALL COST TO ALGERIA. WE CANNOT YET JUDGE WHAT IMPACT THIS MIGHT HAVE ON MOROCCO'S INTERNAL SITUATION.

4. THIS MESSAGE CLEARED WITH AF AND NEA. KISSINGER

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